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A black and white illustration of two young children. A girl with long hair and bangs is in the background, smiling. In the foreground, a young boy with short hair is looking towards the viewer with a neutral expression.

# Plain Talk

**for parents  
about your  
2 to 3 year old**

# Understanding your 2 to 3 year old

*Every child and parent is unique.  
This brochure highlights some general  
patterns of growth and development  
that apply to most children.*

*As you watch, listen to, and play with  
your child, you will discover when she  
or he is ready for new activities and  
skills. You will find your own ways to  
use old and new ideas, to fit your  
individual personality, your family life,  
and your child's needs.*

## General Traits

- Behavior may change quickly from loving to independent and back again
- Needs little help in climbing up and down stairs
- Demands a lot of parental attention
- May hold a glass of milk in one hand
- Knows several hundred words and may now speak in simple two to three-word sentences
- Loves to be read to, but may not have the patience to go through a book cover to cover
- Begins to help in dressing (undressing comes first)
- Uses a spoon in feeding
- May achieve toilet training or show interest in using the toilet
- Likes to imitate adult activities
- Enjoys other children but may find sharing difficult

## What a Parent Can Do

- Your 2 year old's rebelliousness may be hard to take, but it is a positive stage in your child's development, an attempt to move away from babyhood. ("No" will often mean "yes", so look for other cues as well.)
- Rules should be few. Ask yourself: What are the minimum rules ("no's") needed for this age?
- Allow your child to express all feelings, negative as well as positive.
- Allow your child to "help" with simple tasks.
- If you begin toilet training and your efforts don't pay off in a week or two, your child is not ready yet. Go back to diapers.
- Present nutritious meals and leave it at that. Don't push your child to eat.
- Your child is too young to learn table manners.
- Routines help ease bedtime, leave-taking, meals, etc. A nighttime routine might be taking a bath an hour before bedtime, reading a book, a goodnight kiss, a hug and a tuck into bed.
- Temper tantrums are best ignored. Pay as little attention as possible. Let your children know that you love them but not their actions.

## Toys for the 2-3 year old

Cars and trucks  
Pail and shovel  
Baskets  
Crayons (large size)  
Large packing boxes  
Play dough  
Finger paints  
Balls  
Blocks  
Books  
Old keys

Riding toys and wagons  
Toys that teach shapes  
Small animals and people  
Hammer and peg board  
Doll (soft and washable)  
Cloth squares of bright colors (for doll covers, tablecloths)  
Large brushes for "painting" with water